

# The Journal of Behavioral Science (TJBS)

## Original Article

## Examining the Role of Thriving and Ambidexterity on Workplace Friendship and Innovative Work Behavior

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### Article Information

*Received: 12 May 2022*

*Revised: 2 June 2022*

*Accepted for review: 2 June 2022*

### Keywords

Microfinance institutions, workplace friendship, thriving at work, individual ambidexterity, innovative work behavior

### Abstract

In today's uncertain business conditions, companies are required to nurture a benevolent work environment as well as superior employees to maintain their business innovation. The objectives of this study were to analyze the linkage between workplace friendship and employees innovative work behavior (IWB), with thriving at work and individual ambidexterity as mediating variables. This study was conducted in microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Central Java, Indonesia, where 398 salespeople from 56 MFIs participated in the survey. Smart-PLS was used to examine the structural equation model analysis. The result confirmed that workplace friendship significantly impacts innovative work behavior ( $\beta = .35, p = .00$ ). In addition, the finding indicated that workplace friendship shares a positive influence on both thriving at work ( $\beta = .75, p = .00$ ) and an individual's ambidexterity ( $\beta = .22, p = .04$ ). On the other hand, the mediation test also demonstrated that thriving at work ( $\beta = .35, p = .00$ ) and individual ambidexterity ( $\beta = .21, p = .04$ ) are found to be mediators in the connection between workplace friendship and IWB. However, contrary to prediction, an insignificant effect has been found in the relationship between thriving and individual ambidexterity ( $\beta = .04, p = .72$ ). This study recommends MFI managers to enhance thriving and ambidexterity of salespeople by nurturing workplace friendship so that it leads towards higher innovative work behavior.

Workplace innovation has become critical to maintaining a competitive advantage in today's fierce business competition. This applies not only to large companies but also to small-medium enterprises such as microfinance institutions (MFIs). The post-COVID pandemic era requires MFIs to respond quickly to technological advances and seek new service approaches to meet customer expectations. Recent studies revealed that new normal is driving sales companies to adapt to advancements in digital technology and changing customer behavior (Guenzi & Habel, 2020). As a result, MFIs need employees who can develop products and find novel service approaches to cope with business uncertainty. Due to the intricacy of the challenges, employees are encouraged to collaborate and learn to improve innovative work behavior (Sudibjo & Prameswari, 2021). At the same time, MFI management is required to cultivate a supportive and agile work environment that energizes employees to develop products and services innovatively.

A growing body of research has recently investigated the link between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior (IWB) (Cao & Zhang, 2020). Workplace friendship is a non-exclusive working relationship characterized by informality, socio-emotional support, reciprocal trust, and communal norms. Some scholars suggested that workplace friendship might promote emotional intimacy (Guohao et al.,

2021), informal learning (Lee et al., 2022), knowledge-sharing (Helmy et al., 2020), and in turn, lead to innovative behavior (Donati et al., 2016; Tsai et al., 2015). However, even though earlier research suggested a connection between the workplace and innovative work behavior, the conclusion is still unclear. For example, Okoe et al. (2018) examined the role of human resource strategies in innovation in Ghanaian service firms. Unexpectedly, the results indicated that the interaction between workplace friendship and knowledge sharing does not affect service innovation. In line with Okoe, research by Maria Stock et al. (2016) discovered that friendship at work attenuates the connection between job involvement and innovative behavior in the finance and banking industries. This research gap calls for more investigation on the link between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior in a different context (Okoe et al., 2018). Cao and Zhang (2020) also stated that only a limited knowledge scrutinizes the linkage between workplace friendship and employees innovative work behaviors.

Therefore, this study proposes to fill the gap in the literature by examining the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior, with thriving at work and individual ambidexterity as mediating variables. Based on social exchange theory (SET), this study expects that workplace friendship can boost individual thriving and ambidexterity and, in turn, drive employees to engage in innovative behavior. According to SET, if an employee receives support from others, they will provide it in return (Wu & Lee, 2017). In other words, when organizations establish friendships in the workplace, employees will provide each other with support and assistance, thus stimulating them to thrive and perform beyond their in-role performance. Thriving at work is a psychological state consisting of a sense of vitality and learning that flourishes from the collective experience of the employees (Spreitzer et al., 2005). More particularly, vitality reflects the individual's sense of being energetic and alive at work, while learning is the process of growing through obtaining new knowledge and skills. Some scholars revealed that friendship relation at work not merely provide individuals instrumental advantages and assists them in dealing with adversity, but it can foster personal development and provide conditions for acquiring new knowledge and skill, thus serving as a source of vitality and learning (Liu et al., 2021; Mohan & Suppareakchaisakul, 2014; Zhai et al., 2020). Recently, Liu et al. (2021) stated that thriving at work is inextricably linked to the intrinsic motivations that drive employees to perform innovative work behavior.

This study also investigates the possible mediating effect of individual ambidexterity. Individual ambidexterity reflects an individual's ability to balance and synchronize exploration and exploitation activities (Papachroni & Heracleous, 2020). On the individual level, exploration means searching for new knowledge or technology to lift company situations, while exploitation entails enhancing, standardizing, and elaborating existing processes by compiling best practices from other departments (Mu et al., 2022). Workplace friendship shares trust and a supportive work environment that implies fairness, open communication, and aspiration of ambidexterity. Employees with ambidextrous behaviors might think strategically to balance changing mindsets from long-term to short-term, internal, and external prospects, and also gradually implement innovation (Shahid et al., 2020).

This empirical study has focused on the emerging issue MFIs in Indonesia. MFI is a financial institution focusing on developing small businesses through business consulting, savings, and financing services. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises for 2020, Indonesia has around 62 million micro-entrepreneurs that consist of 757 thousand small- and medium-sized businesses, 58.6 thousand medium-sized businesses, and 5.5 thousand corporations. However, the problems faced by small businesses are increasingly complex (Belitski et al., 2022). MFIs must develop an innovation strategy that matches consumer business needs rather than focusing solely on obsolete products and service

delivery. One of the most effective ways to become an innovative organization is to utilize innovative capabilities of the employees that ensure long-term and sustainable effectiveness (De Jong & Hartog, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to strengthen and focus on the factors that improve employees innovative work behavior.

This study contributes to the field of behavioral science and management practice in numerous ways. First, this research extends previous work by investigating the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior through the lens of SET. Prior research on workplace friendship has primarily focused on outcome variables such as job satisfaction and performance, but little attention has been paid to individual behavior (Cao & Zhang, 2020). Second, by investigating the mediation model, this study has examined the underlying mechanism of how workplace friendship encourages employees innovative work behavior via thriving at work and individual ambidexterity. The new understanding may resolve the inconclusive findings in previous literature. Third, this research was conducted in an MFI. To our knowledge, previous studies put little effort into the context of MFIs. Finally, the results of this study are expected to bring insight to MFIs management about how to drive workplace friendship as a booster of employees thriving and ambidexterity that benefits workplace innovation.

## Literature Review

### Innovative Work Behavior

De Jong and Hartog (2010) identify four stages of innovative work behavior: idea exploration, idea promotion, and idea realization. Firms highly value innovative work behavior because it has a significant impact on the success of the firm's performance (Shanker et al., 2017). Employees who engage in innovative behavior can improve their jobs by creating novel ideas and improvement processes. It will enable them to accomplish their jobs more effectively and improve task performance (van Zyl et al., 2021). Given the significance of IWB, scholars are interested in investigating factors that encourage employees IWB banking and financial sector. Recent empirical studies demonstrated empowering leadership (Tri et al., 2019), high-performance work practices, commitment (Obeidat, 2021), work passion (Koednok & Sungsanit, 2018), have successfully improved employee innovative work behavior.

Based on the lens of social exchange theory, this study elucidates the connection between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior via thriving and ambidexterity as mediating variables. Social exchange refers to behaviors reliant on the rewards provided by other people, and it eventually results in beneficial relationships for both parties (Shehawy, 2022). Workplace friendship reflects intimacy and social support. Employees with solid friendships will communicate more frequently and regularly get feedback to provide their work. This mutual relationship may encourage workers to thrive, which, in turn, may foster employees innovative work behavior. Support from coworkers can boost self-confidence and promote more ambidextrous behavior in the workplace, which is associated with innovative work behavior (Tsai et al., 2015).

### Workplace Friendship and Innovative Work Behavior

Workplace friendship is a non-exclusive working relationship characterized by commitment, reciprocal like, mutual trust, and similar interests and values (Berman et al., 2002). Some empirical studies found that workplace friendship has critical to improving individual outcomes, for example: work engagement (Yan et al., 2021), psychological safety (Cao & Zhang, 2020), affective commitment (Guohao et al., 2021), productivity (Yunus & Ernawati, 2018), employees well-being (Hsu et al., 2019) and job

performance (Randhawa & Lee, 2021). However, despite having a benefit, friendships in the workplace can also be detrimental to the organization. At the same time, a recent study also revealed the complexity and downside effect of friendship at work, like rumors, gossip, nepotism, tension, and role conflict (Hommelhoff, 2019; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). These multi-faceted effects of workplace friendships pose a challenge for managers in managing workplace friendships to continue delivering positive individual outcomes, including innovative work behaviors.

This research investigates the connection between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior. Some scholars argue that colleague support can foster innovative behavior of the employees (Kim, 2020; Tsai et al., 2015). According to social exchange theory workplace friendships facilitate a sense of intimacy; therefore, employees with a high level of friendship interact with coworkers more frequently and solicit feedback about ideas for innovation at work (Cao & Zhang, 2020). Tsai et al. (2015) revealed that a creative, friendly, and supportive work atmosphere is related to individual performance, especially in creative jobs. This study suggests that workplace friendship is conducive to innovative behavior. Specifically, workplace friendship will help salespeople obtain helpful information, experience, and skills from colleagues, which are critical in performing innovative selling behavior. Based on the existing literature, this study hypothesized that:

H1: Workplace friendship has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.

### **Workplace Friendship and Thriving at Work**

According to Spreitzer et al. (2005), thriving at work is a psychological condition representing a shared sense of vitality and learning. Employees who experience thriving will be more motivated, energetic, and feel alive (such as vitality), and They will have a sense of growth by acquiring and implementing new knowledge (such as learning). Thriving employees are more optimistic and energetic, better equipped to respond to challenges, and recuperate more quickly from job demand. Recent empirical works found that thriving at work is associated with life satisfaction (Zhai et al., 2020), work engagement, and job crafting (Qi et al., 2019). Moreover, thriving at work is related to essential employee outcomes, including organizational commitment (Abid et al., 2019) and task performance (Kleine et al., 2019). However, Spreitzer et al. (2005) stated that thriving at work does not automatically improve as decreasing stressors but thriving will sprout by facilitating favorable relational characteristics. Pleasant workplace relations could reduce job stress, foster social support and openness, and lead to greater creativity.

The latest study revealed that workplace friendship shares a positive influence on employees thriving at work. Workplace friendship helps individuals cope with adversity and promote personal growth, thus serving as a sense of vitality. Friendship relation also provides a supportive work environment that encourages employees to acquire new knowledge and skills (Colbert et al., 2016). Building on the existing literature, this study assumes that workplace friendship provides salespeople with positive energy and fosters a learning orientation that is valuable when addressing sales challenges. This study proposed:

H2: Workplace friendship has a direct effect on thriving at work.

### **Workplace Friendship and Individual Ambidexterity**

Individual ambidexterity is defined by two sets of behaviors that are adversarial to one another but complementary to one another, namely, explorative and exploitative behaviors. Exploratory conduct, for example, allows individuals to experiment with and explore new approaches while also learning from their

mistakes. Utilizing existing experience and strengthening previously taught tasks, on the other hand, necessitates exploitative behavior, which entails putting things into action. Individual ambidexterity is characterized as the ability to combine these two distinct actions, as well as to integrate learning and put that information into action (Mom et al., 2019). Unlike at the organizational level, ambidexterity at the individual level is more complex. Some scholars argue that ambidextrous people should be both explorative and exploitative at the same time, with high levels of proficiency in both. However, individuals cannot simultaneously perform exploration and exploitation activities at one time (Schnellbacher et al., 2019). Therefore, the challenge of individual ambidexterity is not only the integration or coordination of exploration and extraction processes but also the balancing act between the two modes in order to perform optimally.

This study investigated the relationship between workplace friendship and individual ambidexterity. Previous research demonstrated that workplace friendship facilitates employees exchange of ideas and nurtures open communication (Lee et al., 2022). Other studies also reveal that friendship at work provides conflict management and psychological safety (Cao & Zhang, 2020; Karani et al., 2021). This positive relationship is important to the employee in making change and performing ambidextrous behavior (exploitation and exploration) through social support security. Another study confirmed that high workplace friendship would enable reciprocal trust and reduce anxiety toward uncertain and challenging tasks, thus, encouraging ambidexterity of the employees (Zhang & van Horne, 2019). When workplace friendship is at a low level, the increase in perceived risk and cost of innovation will hinder individuals from taking ambidextrous behavior. Therefore, this study proposed a hypothesis:

H3: Workplace friendship has a direct effect on individual ambidexterity.

### **Thriving at Work and Innovative Work Behavior**

Generally thriving at work is conceptualized as a self-adaptive process that conforms to the autonomous motivation presented in self-determination theory (SDT) and assists employees in adapting to their work environment while also building positive learning and advancement (Liu et al., 2021). Employees who thrive are mainly motivated by the enjoyment of the job and are more concerned with work achievement and recognition. Anderson et al. (2014) stated that thriving at work is aligned with the intrinsic motivation that pushes individuals to perform innovative behaviors. Based on previous research, there are two arguments why thriving at work can increase innovative work behavior. First, thriving shows a sense of learning. When employees thrive in the workplace, they are in a favorable condition to recognize and implement new solutions to problems. In addition, learning allows individuals to acquire new skills, thereby facilitating the generation of new ideas and increasing the confidence to change circumstances. Second, when experiencing vitality at work, individuals have more energy and motivation to perform innovative behaviors (Shahid et al., 2020). Positive moods and emotions facilitate creative thinking and enhance cognitive abilities or problem-solving skills (Lyndon et al., 2018). According to Farid et al. (2021) thriving at work gives employees the energy to grow and develop, which positively contributes to innovative behavior. Thus, this study proposed the hypothesis:

H4: Thriving at work has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.

### **Individual Ambidexterity and Innovative Work Behavior**

Individual ambidexterity is defined as the personal ability to pursue and synergize exploitation and exploration activities (Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019). Exploration activities focus on applying new

knowledge, finding new approaches to solve problems, and employing new routines to achieve a greater degree of innovative performance at the individual level. On the other hand, exploitation activities are concerned with improving routines, learning from prior mistakes, translating experience into new solutions, putting knowledge into action, and refining daily job operations (Rosing & Zacher, 2017). Previous works conclude that individual ambidexterity leads to innovative work behavior. Riaz et al. (2018) noted that employees with ambidexterity might be able to think tactically to manage shifting perspectives from exploration to exploitation, as well as the implementation process of new ideas. Additionally, individuals who are experiencing greater thriving are more likely to be motivated to engage in innovative behavior and to go above and beyond their regular roles and duties (Shahid et al., 2020). Based on the existing literature, this research hypothesized that:

H5: Individual ambidexterity has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.

### **Thriving at Work and Individual Ambidexterity**

Past research concluded that thriving employees are more resilient and energetic, more capable of responding to problems, and recover from the pressures of their jobs more quickly (Prem et al., 2017). Employees with thriving have an insatiable need to learn, which motivates them to participate in exploration and exploitation activities in the workplace (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). For example, improving new products, adapting to shifting markets, and accomplishing the tasks that necessitate to acquire new skills. Liu et al. (2020) stated that as employees thrive, positive moods and emotions facilitate creative thinking and enhance cognitive abilities or problem-solving skills. Prior findings punctuated the link between thriving work and individual ambidexterity. Thus, this research expects that the greater the employee's sense of thriving at work, the greater the employee's ability to engage in ambidextrous behavior. This present study hypothesized that:

H6: Thriving at work has a direct effect on individual ambidexterity.

### **Mediating role of Thriving at Work and Individual Ambidexterity**

In conformity with SET theory, this study argues that workplace friendship positively influences thriving at work and increasing IWB. The characteristics of workplace friendship, such as informality, trust, communal norms, voluntariness, and emotional support, are likely to increase an individual's resources and thriving (Colbert et al., 2016). Salespeople are motivated to engage in innovative work behaviors by the support of colleagues that cultivate a sense of vitality and learning in the workplace. Thus, this study suggested that:

H7: Thriving at work mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior.

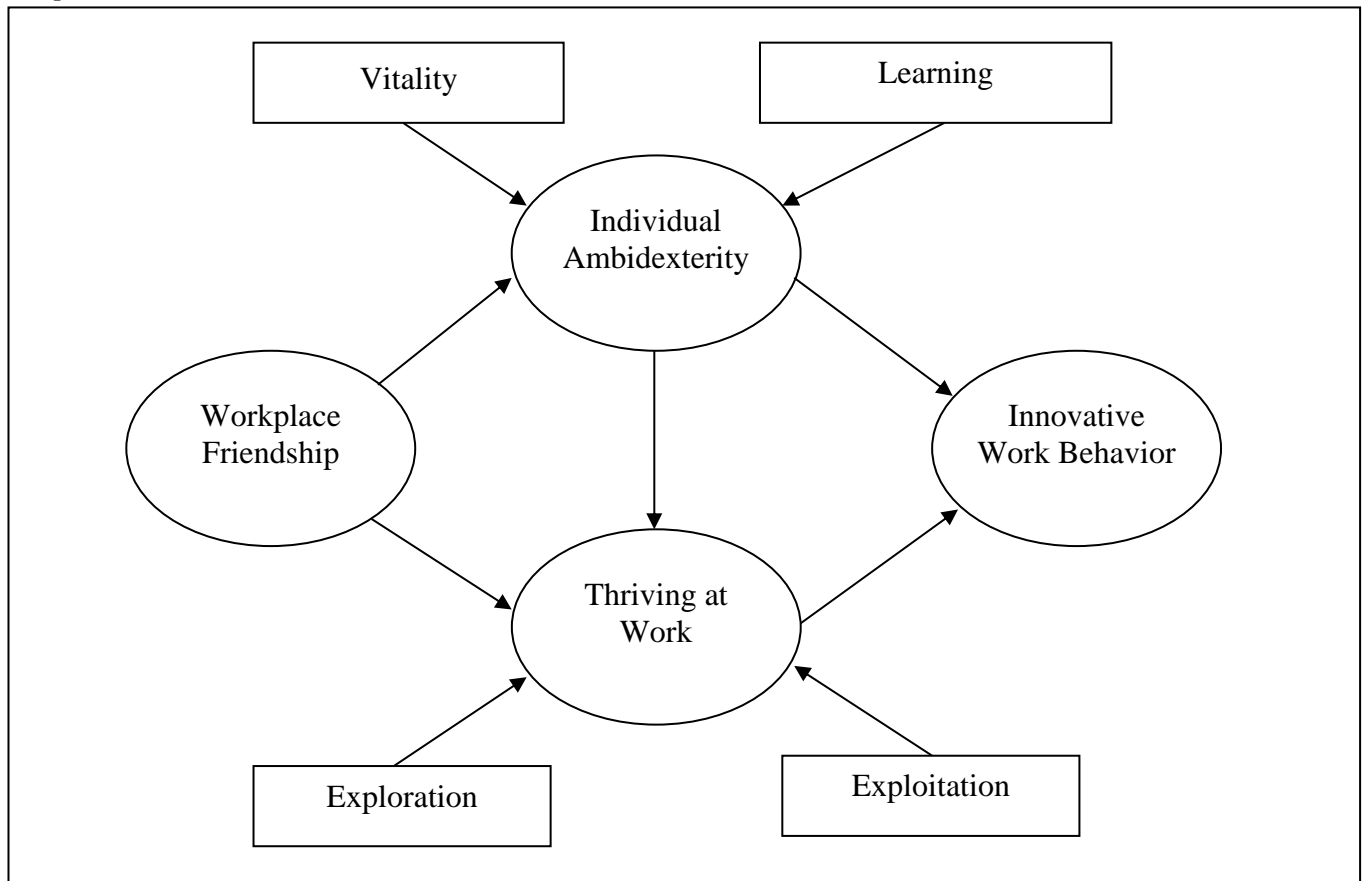
On the other hand, this research proposed that individual ambidexterity links workplace friendship to IWB. Ambidextrous employees can synergize exploration and exploitation activities, thus increasing the knowledge capacity of employees. This accumulation of knowledge helps ambidextrous employees generate new ideas as a critical stage of IWB (Schnellbacher et al., 2019). In line with this argument, Aamir et al. (2021) conclude that workplace friendship facilitates information-sharing activities workplace friendship facilitates information-sharing activities, which are critical to improving individual ambidexterity. Based on this viewpoint, this study expects that friendship in the workplace can promote

salespeople's exploitation and exploration activities and lead to more innovative selling behavior. Thus, this study proposed a hypothesis:

H8: Individual ambidexterity mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior.

This study proposed a research model presented in Figure 1:

**Figure 1**  
*Proposed Research Model*



## Method

### Participants

The sample in this study were salespeople in microfinance institutions that registered in the Community Integrated Services (CIS), Ministry of Cooperatives, and SMEs Indonesia. CIS is a government agency that provides empowerment and guidance to microfinance, cooperatives, and SMEs. This study was conducted in Central Java, one of Indonesia's provinces with the most significant number of MFIs. The first procedure in the survey is coordinating with a microfinance consultant who worked at CIS Central Java. The researchers then mapped the population of MFIs under the CIS consultant's assistance. After fulfilling all formal authorizations and administrative requirements, the research team obtained permission to access MFIs' data and started the survey.

This research used a cross-sectional survey research design (exploratory research). The primary objective for choosing this design was to obtain a representative sample from the population to generalize



the findings of the study. A web-based survey was designed, and a cross-sectional sample of salespeople received a web link to access and complete the survey. There were 459 salespeople surveyed from 56 MFIs in the period December 2021 to February 2022. As a result, 398 questionnaires were already completed and received, which indicated a valid response rate of 86.7%. Based on respondent demographic characteristics, most of salespeople surveyed were males (81.66%). According to educational level, the majority of the respondents (47.74%) were university graduates, 24.37% were vocational school holders, and 27.89% possessed a high school degree. Most respondents (65.08%) worked in cooperatives, while 34.92% worked in Credit Bank/ Microfinance. According to job tenure, 30.40% of respondents had 6 to 9 years of work experience, with the most job positions in marketing staff and supervisors.

## Measurements

This current study utilized a self-reported questionnaire to measure each variable. All of the items were translated from English into the Indonesian language using a method of forwarding and backward translation (Brislin, 1970). The measurement of innovative work behavior was measured using the IWB instrument (six items) developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). Individual ambidexterity comprises two dimensions—exploratory behavior and exploitative behavior, measured by five items and six items respectively by Mom et al. (2007). This study used the thriving at work measurement developed by Porath et al. (2012). The questionnaire included five items evaluating the vitality dimension and five items indicating the learning dimension. Workplace friendship was measured using a workplace prevalence instrument (six items) developed by Nielsen et al. (2000). All the items were scored with a 5- point Likert scale, with responses (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

## Ethical Consideration

As an ethical consideration, all stages of this research have complied with the ethical requirements established by the Management Research Ethics Board of Universitas Putra Bangsa, Indonesia, on March 02, 2022 (reference number: 0316/EC/M-HR-2022).

## Results

The objective of the present study is to investigate the link between workplace friendship and IWB. In addition, this study also analyses the mediating effect of thriving at work and ambidexterity on the workplace friendship-IWB relationship. Smart PLS 3 Version 2.0 was used to examine the empirical model proposed. Smart PLS is a statistical program that examines the relationship between variables, including latent and indicator variables. Smart PLS is recommended when the number of samples is limited and the model is complex (Hair et al., 2017). This study has completed the model fit test as indicated by the parameters of standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) with a score of .075, less than .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1998), and the normed fit index (NFI) value of .915, is above .09 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Thus, we found a significant model fit for this study

In the present study, Skewness and kurtosis tests were used to check data normality. Hair et al. (2017) stated that the data distribution is normal if the value of skewness and kurtosis are between -1 and +1. Although the skewness score in this study (-.574 to .734) is in the range suggested by Hair, the kurtosis score indicated nonnormal (-2.041 to 1.432). Nevertheless, smart-PLS is appropriate for nonnormal distributed data (Vinzi et al., 2010); thus, it rules out the normality result. Smart-PLS model evaluation includes two stages (Hair et al., 2017). First stage is the measurement model assessment to evaluate construct validity and reliability, and the second stage is a structural model evaluation to examine the significance of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables in the structural model.



**Table 1***Assessment of Factor Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Convergent Validity*

Construct		Items	Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Workplace Friendship	WF1	I have formed strong friendships at work.	.72	.80	.85	.50
	WF2	I socialize with coworkers outside of the workplace.	.73			
	WF3	I can confide in people at work.	.76			
	WF4	I feel I can trust many coworkers a great deal.	.78			
	WF5	Being able to see my coworkers is one reason why I look forward to my job.	.71			
	WF6	I do not feel that anyone I work with is a true friend. (I)	.72			
Innovative Work Behavior	IWB1	I come up with innovative and creative notions	.84	.90	.82	.67
	IWB2	I try to propose my own creative ideas and convince others	.80			
	IWB3	I seek new service techniques, methods, or techniques	.88			
	IWB4	I provide a suitable plan for developing new ideas	.85			
	IWB5	I try to secure the funding and resources needed to implement innovations	.87			
	IWB6	Overall, I consider myself a creative member	.72			
Vitality		<i>At work ...</i>		.88	.81	.63
	VT1	I feel alive and vital	.71			
	VT2	I have energy and spirit	.85			
	VT3	I do not feel very energetic (I)	.78			
	VT4	I feel alert and awake	.88			
	VT5	I am looking forward to each new day	.73			
Learning		<i>At work ...</i>		.89	.82	.66
	LN1	I find myself learning often	.81			
	LN2	I continue to learn more as time goes by.	.83			
	LN3	I see myself continually improving	.76			
	LN4	I am not learning (I)	.85			
	LN5	I am developing a lot as a person.	.82			
Exploration	EXP1	<i>In the last year I was engaged in...</i> searching for new possibilities with respect to work.	.85	.80	.82	.68
	EXP2	evaluating diverse options with respect to work.	.77			
	EXP3	focusing on strong renewal of product or services, or market	.89			
	EXP4	activities requiring quite some adaptability of me.	.85			
	EXP5	activities requiring me to learn new skills or knowledge.	.78			
Exploitation		<i>In the last year I was engaged in...</i>		.84	.92	.65
	EXL1	activities of which a lot of experience had been accumulated by myself.	.86			
	EXL2	activities which served customer with existing service/ product.	.86			
	EXL3	activities of which it was clear to me how to conduct them.	.73			
	EXL4	activities primarily focused on achieving short-term goals.	.84			
	EXL5	activities which I could properly conduct by using my present knowledge.	.80			
	EXL6	activities which clearly fitted into existing organizational policy	.90			

Note. CA= Cronbach's Alpha, CR=Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted.

### Assessment of the measurement model

The assessment of measurement model conducted to test the constructs validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2014). As shown in Table 1, the loading factor of all items for the first order construct has a value between 71-90. This result is above the threshold value of .70, which indicates support for construct validity.

**Table 2***Assessment of Second-Order Constructs.*

Construct	Dimensions	Outer loading	CA	CR	AVE
Thriving at Work	Vitality	.95	.86	.87	.58
	Learning	.95			
Individual ambidexterity	Exploration	.96	.94	.95	.61
	Exploitation	.96			

**Table 3***Mean, Standard Deviation, and Discriminant Validity*

Constructs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	WF	IWB	VT	LN	EXP	EXL
Workplace Friendship (WF)	3.41	.38	.96					
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	3.34	.54	.61	.82				
Vitality (VT)	3.48	.50	.78	.57	.80			
Learning (LN)	3.31	.40	.79	.64	.62	.85		
Exploration (EXP)	3.11	.51	.72	.65	.75	.71	.80	
Exploitation (EXL)	3.05	.61	.70	.59	.68	.70	.73	.76

*Note.* Diagonal values are the square root of AVE, off-diagonal values are the correlation between constructs, *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation.

The average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and CA for all constructs exceeded the .50, .80, and .70 cut-off values, respectively (Henseler et al., 2009). As a result, convergent reliability was assessed. Additionally, Table 3 presents that the square root of the AVE was greater than the construct's inter-correlations with other constructs, ensuring discriminant validity. This study also estimated the validity and reliability of the second order, as shown in Table 2. The results revealed that the factor loading for second-order, which represents the strength of the relationship between first and higher-order, surpassed the recommended value of .70 (Mohammad et al., 2018). Also, the CR, Cronbach alpha, and AVE of the second-order were greater than .80, .70, and .50, respectively, providing evidence of reliable and valid higher-order measures (Henseler et al., 2009). As a result, first and second-order were fit with the measurement model because they provide reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

This study also estimated the validity and reliability of the second order, as shown in Table 3. Repeated indicator approach is employed to estimate a model with higher-order constructs (thriving at work and individual ambidexterity). The results revealed that the factor loading for second-order, which represents the strength of the relationship between first and higher-order, surpassed the recommended value of .70 (Mohammad et al., 2018). Also, the CR, Cronbach alpha, and AVE of the second-order were greater than .80, .70, and .50, respectively, providing evidence of reliable and valid higher-order measures (Henseler et al., 2009). As a result, it can be concluded that the 10 items, classified into two categories (vitality and learning), could be used to measure overall thriving at work. Additionally, 11 items classified as exploration and exploitation could be used to assess individual ambidexterity. Finally, the first and second-order were fit with the measurement model because they provide reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

### Assessment of Structural Model

Table 4 provides a structural model assessment that explains the direct and indirect relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables. This study has examined the effects of workplace friendship on IWB, thriving at work, and individual ambidexterity in hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. This study confirmed that workplace friendship has significant influences on IWB ( $\beta = .35$ ;  $p = .00$ ), thriving at work ( $\beta = .75$ ;  $p = .00$ ), and individual ambidexterity ( $\beta = .22$ ;  $p = .04$ ). As a result, H1, H2, and H3 were supported. Additionally, this study found that thriving at work has a positive effect on IWB ( $\beta = .47$ ;  $p = .00$ ), thereby

supporting H4. Individual ambidexterity, on the other hand, has a significant relationship with IWB ( $\beta = .59$ ;  $p = .00$ ), supporting H5. However, contrary to prediction, the results indicated that thriving at work has an insignificant effect on individual ambidexterity ( $\beta = .04$ ;  $p = .72$ ). As a result, H6 was unsupported. According to a specific indirect effect test (Hair et al., 2017), this study demonstrated that thriving at work partially mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and IWB ( $\beta = .35$ ;  $p = .00$ ). Moreover, individual ambidexterity partially mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and IWB ( $\beta = .21$ ;  $p = .04$ ); thereby, H7 and H8 were supported.

**Table 4**  
*Structural Model Assessment*

Variables	Path Coefficient	SD	t-Statistics	Hypothesis
WFS → IWB	.35**	.11	3.17	H1: Supported
WFS → TAW	.75***	.04	19.8	H2: Supported
WFS → IAM	.22*	.11	2.03	H3: Supported
TAW → IWB	.47**	.15	3.18	H4: Supported
IAM → IWB	.59***	.11	5.34	H5: Supported
TAW → IAM	.04	.12	.36	H6: Unsupported
<i>Specific Indirect Effect</i>				
WF → TAW → IWB	.35**	.34	3.11	H7: Supported
WFS → IAM → IWB	.21*	.21	2.00	H8: Supported

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , SD = standard deviation, WF = workplace friendship, IWB = innovative work behavior, TAW = thriving at work, IAM = individual ambidexterity

## Discussion and Implications

### Main Results

This study proposed to examine the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior, as well as the role of thriving at work and individual ambidexterity as mediating variables. According to the results, the present study confirmed that workplace friendship positively affects innovative work behavior. Workplace friendship has a significant influence on thriving at work and individual ambidexterity. Furthermore, according to the mediating effect test, the results indicated that both thriving at work and individual ambidexterity have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior. However, one hypothesis is not accepted, thriving at work has an insignificant effect on individual ambidexterity.

Based on social exchange theory, this finding indicated that employees who have friends at work are more likely to engage in innovative behavior. This study concluded that informality, trust, social support, and voluntariness, as characteristics of workplace friendship, could encourage employees to be more innovative. Workplace friendship provides a comfortable work environment that drives salespeople to nurture open communication and voluntarily share selling experience, which in turn improves selling innovation. Friendship at work could serve as a source of support for salespeople to implement a new technique or selling approach in service delivery. This study supported prior research that revealed workplace friendship as a critical factor in enhancing employees innovative work behaviors in sales organizational settings (Guohao et al., 2021).

This present study showed the significant role of workplace friendship in stimulating employees to thrive at work and fostering innovative work behavior. In the context of a sales organization, this study showed that workplace friendship has a positive association with salespeople's thriving. Friendship could sometimes incite competition in the pursuit of sales targets that encourage a sense of vitality and positive enthusiasm at work. In terms of learning, friends often provide sales information and experience beneficial

for work improvement. Shahid et al. (2020) stated that friendly relations could energize employees to learn and develop in the workplace. On the other hand, this study reported that the connection between thriving at work and individual ambidexterity was insignificant. The study argued that the inconsistencies might be due to the fact that most of the respondents were male. Previous studies reported that men were less engaged in the exploration and exploitative activities (Torres et al., 2015), which indicated lower individual ambidexterity than female employees. In this regard, future research is needed given the paucity of studies investigating the link between thriving at work and individual ambidexterity.

This study also found that workplace friendship has a positive linkage with individual ambidexterity and innovative work behavior. As explained earlier, individual ambidexterity is an employee's ability to optimize exploration and exploitation activities at work. Ambidextrous salespeople were crucial in dealing with business uncertainty and erratic consumer behavior. Thus, having friends at work could provide trust and psychological support for salespeople who might have a risk of failure in their ambidextrous activities. Employees were more likely to take an action beyond their standard roles. High levels of workplace friendship would hasten resource sharing and encourage employees to support one another more frequently, which eventually leads to a cooperative working environment and improved problem-solving skills (Donati et al., 2016).

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This research has some limitations that should be considered in future research. First, a limited number of MFIs employees may affect workplace friendship formation. This further study suggested investigating larger employee-sized industries (such as manufacturing and hospitality) to increase the generalizability of the research findings. Second, this study had predominantly male respondents. Given that past studies highlighted women's complexities in their working relationships and ambidexterity, it would be worthwhile for future work investigating the effect of gender differences on the link between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007; Torres et al., 2015).

### **Implications for Behavioral Science**

This study provides both practical and theoretical implications for behavioral science. First, this study extended past literature by developing a research model that predicts a salesperson's innovative work behavior. In response to previous research gaps, this study revealed that thriving at work and individual ambidexterity can link workplace friendship and innovative work behavior. This study also contributes to the SET literature by investigating how workplace friendship stimulates employees thriving and ambidextrous behavior that fosters innovative work behavior. Second, this study offers several practical implications for MFIs. This study suggests that managers consider workplace friendship as a source of thriving and ambidexterity that increases salespeople's innovative work behavior. Managers should provide a comfortable workspace for employee interaction. Face-to-face interaction builds the personal understanding and connection needed for friendship formation and maintenance. This study recommends that managers maintain activities to strengthen friendship bonds, such as team building, group development, or collaborative work. Having them work in collaboration with others could minimize social conflict and enrich coworker relationships. This study also recommends that managers appreciate thriving employees and support ambidextrous behavior. This could be accomplished by scheduling a training program for salespeople with a high level of thriving and ambidexterity, also giving them an incentive to be productive.

### **Conclusion**

This empirical evidence showed how workplace friendship significantly improves employees innovative work behavior. Friendly relationships in the workplace promoted a collaborative environment that supports positive interaction and knowledge-sharing, which enhance employees innovative work behaviors. The study also demonstrated that thriving at work and individual ambidexterity both mediated the relationship between workplace friendship and innovative work behavior. Having friends at work can help employees to thrive and perform ambidextrous behaviors, which encourages salespeople to be more innovative at work.

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